

Approved For Release 2003/09/16 : CIA-RDP96-00787R000500240023-8

A case for parapsychology

Mind-Reach

Scientists Look at Psychic Ability.
By Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff.
230 pp. New York:
G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$8.95.

By ROBERT ORNSTEIN

The scientific study of parapsychology has been with us for almost a century now, with little in the way of definitive results. One of the major problems in our acceptance of parapsychology, of course, is that we are quite resistant to new information and phenomena which we consider a priori to be impossible. We do not normally pursue scientific inquiry, for instance, into these areas. If I were to propose an experiment in training elephants to become peach trees I do not think much financial support would appear nor could I enlist anyone's enthusiastic help. People simply do not inform themselves about things they do not believe to be possible.

Such was the case within more conventional science with Copernicus's proposition of a universe that differed fundamentally from that of Ptolemy, with Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood and even in the reporting of the Wright brothers' first air flight. Many newspapers, including The New York Times, simply refused to cover it because they did not think it was possible.

In parapsychology, we find this rejection to an extreme, unmatched perhaps in any area. Even the great 19th-century German physiologist Hermann Helmholtz, distinguished in the areas of optics, physics and the study of perception wrote, "Neither the evidence of my own senses nor the testimony of all the fellows of the Royal Society" would convince him

of the truth of parapsychological data. In a professional review of the work of Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, authors of "Mind-Reach," an anonymous reviewer in The Journal of Electrical and Electronic Engineers wrote, "This is the kind of thing I wouldn't believe in even if it were true."

One of the basic difficulties in understanding parapsychology is that its claims are a distinct challenge to our contemporary world-view. If some people can perceive events before they "happen," if there are modes of interpersonal communication unknown to

many, if people can influence action and/or events at a distance greater than the range of normal influence, then perhaps we need dramatically to revise our conception of human abilities and/or conception of how events are registered by people. Since the burden of documentation, though, should be on those who claim that these capacities exist, their interpretations of the nature of their data should be accepted only after much evidence has been accumulated.

There seems to be a persistent fallacy regarding the work of parapsychologists that is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of scientific proof—an assumption that one demonstration, one example of a unique phenomenon should be enough to convince us that parapsychological or any other sort of scientific phenomena exist. William James expressed this proposition when he said that the appearance of only one white crow would dispel forever the idea that all crows are black. But that is true only in an extremely idealistic universe. We need much more evidence than one isolated instance to overthrow an accepted world-view. The existence of William James's white crow could well be dismissed by our statistics department as statistically insignificant. One bit of evidence ought to be enough but it is not.

"Every man is an exception," as Soren Kirkegaard wrote. We are all 4 billion-to-one shots and, as scientists, need much more than occasional long-shots to convince us.

Many publicizers of parapsychology have sought to counter their skeptics by Proclamation. They claim—and Targ and Puthoff are no exception—that there is a significant amount of incontrovertible, scientific evidence in favor of the existence of parapsychological phenomena. And the only reason these phenomena are not more widely accepted is because of hostile prejudices, because of preconceptions in the minds of readers and reviewers, and because of blindness.

"Mind-Reach" fairly straightforwardly describes the experiments carried out at the Stanford Research Institute in Menlo Park, Calif., on so-called paranormal phenomena by Targ and Puthoff, who are physicists. The authors outline several of their own experiments in the book: One of these experiments involved "remote viewing," in which a person sequestered in a room is asked to describe a place chosen at random and not revealed to the subject where two other people have gone. These descriptions are then matched with "objective" descriptions of the places. Other experiments included a test of precognition, in which people were asked to guess a

random event on a machine and picture drawing, in which the Israeli psychic Uri Geller attempted to draw pictures like those previously sealed in envelopes and kept in a different room. All of these experiments are reported as successes by the authors but they provide very little evidence either in their book or in published journal articles that any of them can be repeated. Nor has anyone else reported similar results.

Here is the difficulty: If the experiments cannot be repeated by others we have the situation of the one white crow. It may be theoretically true (assuming we take his word that he saw one) that all crows are not black, but that is irrelevant unless he can produce another white one as proof. Again, parapsychologists labor under a fundamental misconception of the importance of the idea of chance, of the idea of science, and of the necessity for the verification.

"Mind-Reach," then, is a book slim in hard evidence. It is pleasantly written, and it is amusing to follow the thought of the authors as they work out their research and sometimes horrifying to see what their opposition has been. But it is ultimately an unsatisfying book lacking any indication of

the solidity of the findings and of the ability of anyone else to repeat them.

Indeed, I have attempted, in collaboration with these authors, to repeat one of their experiments (published in Nature) and was unable to do so though I spent a large amount of time trying and had the same subject they used and the full cooperation of the authors. Instead of any real evidence that accords with the accepted standards of contemporary psychophysiological research, what we have in this book are a few minor, sketchy suggestions of how research in this area ought to proceed. The authors do make some useful points. We should stick to conditions which mimic those of everyday life, not useless, trivial situations (although they ignore their own advice in one of their experiments).

Further, even if it is granted that they have demonstrated "remote viewing," the phenomenon has been studied only on a very few people. When the authors attempt to "sell" that psychic abilities are found

in all people—the blurb of the book claims that they have documented that "some degree of psychic ability is universal"—they are engaging in the same sort of unjustified propagandizing they decry in their opponents. It is one thing to say that "here we demonstrate a minor finding in a few subjects which might be used by others," but it is ridiculous to ask us to believe that their minor, preliminary experiments prove anything about psychic abilities in the general population.

Throughout the book the authors state their hope that the study of parapsychology will become primarily a scientific one in which speculations are firmly grounded in the evidence. In their own writing, however, Targ and Puthoff almost always go beyond evidence and claim they have proven their case when they have done nothing of the sort. In writing this book, the authors have done more harm, perhaps, to their own position and to their field of study than they have helped. ■

Robert Ornstein teaches at the University of California Medical Center and is the director of Human Nature, a magazine to appear in the fall.

Continued on Page 24

March 7, 1977

Mr. Harvey Shapiro, Editor
The New York Times Book Review
229 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Shapiro:

Robert Ornstein in his review of our book Mind-Reach in the March 13th Book Review implies that our experiments in Remote Viewing, the main concern of the book, lack "solidity" and cannot be repeated by anyone.

This is simply not true.

Our experiments in Remote Viewing have been widely replicated in half a dozen laboratories across the country. Three of these were published in the Proceedings of the Electrical and Electronic Engineers (October 1976) - a journal Ornstein refers to - and a fourth was presented at the August 1976 annual meeting of the Parapsychological Association, all well in advance of the book's review.

For Ornstein to state that there has been no replication is an inexcusable faux pas for a scientist supposedly knowledgeable in the field he is reviewing.

Our experiments at Stanford Research Institute are among the most severely monitored in the history of science. Literally dozens of qualified consultants and judges were involved in creating and evaluating the results described in the book. The evidence accumulated was solid enough to impress some of science's most responsible authorities, including Dr. Margaret Mead, who wrote the Introduction.

We are aware that Mind-Reach delves into a subject sensitive in science. In the case of this review, it turned out to be so mind-bending that several basic facts normally noted in any diligent critique were missing: that the book is Illustrated (with 48 drawings and photographs), that it includes the Mead introduction and Foreword by Richard Bach. You even gave it to the wrong publisher. Mind-Reach was published, with pride we are assured, by Delacorte Press/Eleanor Friede, not by the publisher you credited. The record needs setting straight.

Sincerely,

Russell Targ *Harold Puthoff*
Russell Targ Harold Puthoff

Stanford Research Institute
Menlo Park, California

ENC 3

THE CITY COLLEGE
OF
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10031

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

January 1, 1977

Dear Russell and Hal:

Happy New Year! And many thanks for arranging to have me sent a copy of your book!

I congratulate you on it. It's beautifully written, in such an easy style that I couldn't stop it once it was begun -- finished it in a single sitting. And it presents impressively so much that's important and interesting, that the content is a pleasure as well as the style. I should think it would bowl over the readers who didn't know about your work beforehand -- and am sure that parapsychologists will be grateful for it, because it puts all together in one place the corpus of work you've done.

The timing was particularly good for me. It came the same day as the galley's for my ms. for Wolman's Handbook, and I revised them to give two citations to the book.

Thanks again, and hopes that you'll carry on with all your bright ideas for what needs doing!

Cordially,

Gertrude
Gertrude Schmeidler

Editor: Barbara Bader
Fiction Editor: Alice E. Wolff
Associate Editors: Zane Berzins
Nancy Klein
Betsy Lichtenberg
Business Manager: Harriet Prager

IRKUS
REVIEWS

200 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003

SG11

ENC 4

In quoting or excerpting please refer to
THE IRKUS REVIEWS
Date of Issue: 12/15/74

Targ, Russell &
Harold Puthoff
MIND-REACH: *Scientists
Look at Psychic Ability*
Delacorte \$8.95
1/? SBN: 440-05688-7

Superficially it would seem that physicists and engineers would be the least likely supporters of extrasensory phenomena. But here we have two physicists at the distinguished Stanford Research Institute who have been doing rigorous experiments and conclude that There is Something There and it is something that probably exists in everyman. That something is remote viewing: the ability of a subject at X to describe in words or drawings the details of a locale chosen by an experimenter miles away. They report on a number of experienced subjects, including Uri Geller, as well as some willing volunteers. All did better than chance would predict—even better in terms of drawings alone rather than verbal descriptions. Targ and Puthoff speculate that there may be some right hemisphere perceptual ability here that has gone unnoticed or shoved under the table in our rationalist analytic era. They also suggest that extremely low frequency electromagnetic waves may be involved, so that the phenomena need not remain beyond scientific ken. There is something very likeable about the pair: their attitude; their sophistication with regard to True Believers, to the possibilities of fraud and deception; and their understanding of the "loyal opposition" (e.g., Martin Gardner and others who wouldn't believe in ESP even if it were true). Margaret Mead has written an encouraging introduction showing she's ready to move with a shifting paradigm. Others, up to this point unconvinced, may be shaken up a bit (experience "cognitive dissonance" as the psychologists say). In any case, the results reported, confined to a small sample but with decent rigor, lob the ball squarely in the court of the nay-sayers. It will be interesting to watch the play that follows.



Recommended by *The Booklist*
MADELEINE L'ENGLE'S
 NEW BOOK,

The Irrational Season

"L'Engle's spiritual exercises over a year of seasonal changes and the Christian church calendar are shared in these reflections from her personal journal. As the author's beliefs inform everyday joys, frustrations, and conflicts, L'Engle determinedly comes to grips with herself, mankind, and her faith."—*ALA, The Booklist*

"... The most compelling parts of this sensitive book describe the author's periods of atheism and her fight to recover from 'cold isolation,' the terror of believing in nothing."—*Publishers' Weekly*

LC 76-46944 0-8164-0324-4 \$8.95

Recommended by *Library Journal*
JOHN COGLEY'S
 AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A Canterbury Tale

Experiences and Reflections, 1946-1976

"In this gentle, low key autobiography, a longtime editor and columnist for the Catholic weekly, *Commonweal* vividly recalls one of the most turbulent periods in our nation's religious history... his lively narrative captures the reader's attention and holds it fast. This is American cultural history in the best sense of that term: colorful, interesting, and full of insights."—*Library Journal*

"A gem..."—*New York Times Book Review*

LC 76-21864 0-8164-0322-8 \$8.95

Catalogs on complete publishing programs available from
THE SEABURY PRESS
 65 East 42nd Avenue
 New York, N.Y. 10017

... and the concept of a form of conscious memory or defense mechanism. This volume repeats the three earlier books on children, with updated bibliography. Despite awkward syntax and digressive intellectualizing, it would be appropriate for psychology collections, especially those lacking Absen's earlier works. *William Abrams, Portland State Univ. Lib., Ore.*

Higbee, Kenneth L. *Your Memory: how it works and how to improve it.*

Prentice Hall, 1977. 158p. ISBN 0-13-980144-8, \$9.95; pap. Spectrum, ISBN 0-13-980136-7, \$3.95.

This book provides a reasonable balance between the oversimplified popular books about mnemonics and the empirical research on learning and memory. Following a general introduction concerning the nature of memory and techniques for studying it, Higbee (a psychologist at Brigham Young University) discusses some basic principles of memory improvement, strategies for effective learning, some general rules for improving memory, and four specific memory systems (link, loci, peg, and phonetic). In addition, these are related to some practical situations to illustrate their effectiveness. The writing is clear; technical references are cited but do not bog the reader down in technical jargon or unnecessary detail. The author is commendably cautious in repeatedly emphasizing that improving one's memory is hard work. —*Charles L. Brewer, Dept. of Psychology, Furman Univ., Greenville, S.C.*

Kennedy, Eugene. *On Becoming a Counselor: a basic guide for non-professional counselors.*

Crossroad, Seabury, 1977. 312 p. ISBN 0-8197-0112-5, \$12.50. This is an excellent and refreshingly lively guide to dealing with adolescents and adults in a helping capacity. Kennedy's emphasis in the counseling-therapy situation is on eliminating stress in the relationship and on the importance of the counselor's knowledge of self. Descriptions of classical definitions of personality types are impressively updated and presented in a style suitable for the lay counselor and student. The end of the book, dealing with situations such as grief, suicide, drug abuse, and "emergencies," lacks the authority of the chapters on personality, but as a whole the book should be useful to clergy, educators, and other non-professional counselors as a lively, practical introductory text with many fine basic bibliographies. For older graduate and graduate education, psychology, and social work libraries, and for large cosmopolitan public libraries. —*Anne F. Dykstra, Brooklyn, P.L.*

Luria, A. R. *Cognitive Development: its cultural and social foundations.*

Harvard Univ. Pr. 1976. 175p. (ed. by Michael Cole. Illus. index illus.) LC 76-24877. ISBN 0-674-13731-0, \$12.50.

This work, which appeared in its original Russian in 1972, describes field work conducted during 1935 to 1937 with the intent of studying the psycho-

logical difference between the impact of the socialist revolution on the remote and ancient Islamic culture of Luria, a professor of psychology at Moscow University, is renowned for his work on the development of language and thought. The unique conditions of this investigation allowed the author to compare from the same culture both underdeveloped groups and groups already beginning to be involved in modern life. Luria studied differences in conceptualization in terms of perception, abstraction, reasoning, and imagination, and the resultant analysis clearly shows the socio-historical shaping of these higher mental processes. Luria's procedure of observation and carefully structured questioning is elegant in its simplicity and naturalness and represents a significant advance in clinical field methodology. An interesting treatise on cognition, having definite implications for cultural anthropology and for the developmental psychology of cultural minorities. —*William Abrams, Portland State Univ. Lib., Ore.*

Ward, Alan J. with contribs. by H. Allen Handford, M.D. & Virginia M. Leith. *Childhood Autism & Structural Therapy: selected papers on early childhood autism.*

Nelson Hall, 1976. 222p. index. LC 76-23171. ISBN 0-91012-56-7, \$12.50.

This collection of 16 papers (all previously published) acknowledges only lightly that the psychological nature of autism is very much in question. Ward's and his colleagues' bias is clearly a psychodynamic one. Though he appears to accept the neurophysiologic basis for many of the autistic symptoms, his treatment approach is based on an ego developmental theory which has, at best, an uncertain support in the data on autism. Ward's book describes structural play therapy as an ordered incremental program for addressing the observed developmental deficits of the autistic child while at the same time intuitively responding to his emotional needs. He reports some success. However, the articles documenting this success are exasperatingly redundant in their discussions of etiology and definition, and in the repeated descriptions of the technique and rationale of Ward's structural therapy. Readers would have been better served with a more comprehensive review of the literature. —*James Charney, M.D., Dept. of Psychiatry, Yale Univ. Sch. of Medicine*

Parapsychology & Occultism

Targ, Russell & Harold Puthoff. *Mind-Reach: scientists look at psychic ability.*

Delacorte, 1977. 280p. intro. by Margaret Mead. illus. index. ISBN 0-440-05688-7, \$8.95.

Since 1972 physicists Targ and Puthoff have been carrying out parapsychology experiments at the Stanford Research Institute. *Mind-Reach*, a review and summary of their research to date, reports the results of "remote viewing" experiments, in which the experimenters asked subjects to describe their in-

jects—politics, charity, arts. Go to work for **Approved For Release 2003/09/16 : CIA-RDP96-00787R000500240023-8** and learn at his feet—and so on. This might have been a practical manual in the go-go conglomerate years of the 1960s, but today it's whimsy. [January]

MORTAL LESSONS:

Notes on the Art of Surgery. Richard Selzer. Simon and Schuster, \$7.95 ISBN 0-671-22356-9

In this strange and remarkable book, Richard Selzer, a surgeon at Yale Medical Center, juxtaposes reflection with information, anatomy with literature, horror with humor and surgery with poetry (just occasionally marred by whimsy), all in language that's as sharp as a scalpel. He takes us into the operating room and into the patient's very innards; talks beguilingly about bones, liver, kidneys, skin and other parts of the body (skipping those much-touted organs the brain and the heart); and provides essays on baldness, smoking, Chinese acupuncture and abortion, as well as some lighter pieces on his youth in Troy, New York. He ends, not as inappropriately as might seem, with a charming piece on birdwatching. Even Selzer's grisliest anecdotes are transformed in the telling by his belief that the surgeon's function overlaps those of the poet and the priest. Old drawings. [January]

BLYE, PRIVATE EYE:

The Real World of the Private Detective. Nicholas Pileggi. Playboy Press, \$8.95 ISBN 0-87223-475-4

This slice of life is an honest picture of what a private detective's work is all about; it is revealing and fascinating. Irwin Blye has been a private investigator for 20 years in and around New York, and he is a good one. His job consists not of chasing Maltese falcons for sexy blondes, but of helping lawyers shepherd people through a system that is bureaucratized, bungling and indifferent. Here we follow him as he works on three cases: looking up wit-

nesses for a man accused in a South American case; trying to ascertain her husband's income in case there is a divorce, and working on an instance of a landlord's negligence. The rape case has an outcome, but the other two trail off, leaving loose ends. It all has the ring of truth and Pileggi does an admirable job of telling the story. [January]

THE CHRYSANTHEMUM

AND THE BAT: Baseball Samurai Style. Robert Whiting. Dodd, Mead, \$10 ISBN 0-396-07317-4

American baseball fans will find this book irresistible. Whiting has done an outstanding job of showing how the Japanese national character has shaped the diamond game in that country. In spring training, players are put through a regimen that would make a chain gang seem like a vacation. Throughout the 130-game season the two six-team major leagues demand from their team members a combination of "fighting spirit" (which does not include aggressive baserunning or beanball pitches) and traditional respect for authority figures (apologies to coaches, managers and fans are commonplace). *Besuboru* is truly the Japanese national game, with several daily papers devoted exclusively to it and the TV networks saturated with it. Of course the nation looks forward to the day of victory over the U.S. in a true World Series. Photos. [January]

MIND-REACH: Scientists

Look at Psychic Ability. Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff. Delacorte Press (An Eleanor Friede Book), \$8.95 ISBN 0-440-05688-7

In a no-nonsense report to which Margaret Mead has lent her scientific imprimatur with a brief introduction, physicists Targ and Puthoff describe a series of parapsychology experiments as dramatic as any ever undertaken. That these experiments, conducted at Stanford Research Institute, have generated much publicity is partly due to the participation of psychic wizards Uri Geller and Ingo Swann. Yet most of the participants were ordinary people who were presumably able to accurately describe "target drawings" hidden from view as well as distant geographical sites. The authors furnish transcripts of the experiments, hints for would-be "remote viewers" and one or two new hypotheses. Most striking are the photographs of the "targets" juxtaposed with the volunteers' sketches so that readers can form their own opinion. Index, etc. [January]

THE IRRATIONAL SEASON.

Madeleine L'Engle. Crossroads/Seabury Press, \$8.95 ISBN 0-8164-0324-4 It's hard to imagine readers failing to get a spiritual lift from L'Engle's new

offering, no matter what their faith or lack of it. With the thrust behind the women's movement, the book is especially valuable, for it's an exploration of L'Engle's life as a professional woman, wife, mother and grandmother. Combining anecdotes, poetry and a discussion of human relationships, the text is infused with feelings humorous and sad—sometimes tragic. Mostly the author reaffirms her commitment to Christianity, a faith which has frequently been weakened by doubts for solid reasons, not all personal. In fact, the most compelling parts of this sensitive book describe the author's periods of atheism and her fight to recover from "cold isolation," the terror of believing in nothing. *Seabury's Lenten selection for 1977.* [January]

HONEY: The Life

and Loves of Lenny's Shady Lady. Honey Bruce with Dana Benenson. Playboy Press, \$8.95 ISBN 0-87223-435-3

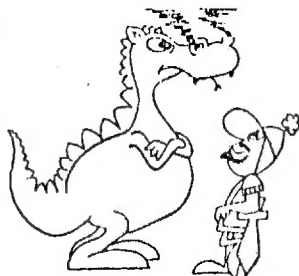
Most readers won't know whether to applaud the candor of this "true confession" of the woman who was Lenny Bruce's wife or be turned off by its emphasis on matters sexual with every *i* dotted and every *t* crossed. Those whom it does not affect violently one way or the other will find it the story of a lower middle-class girl who became a stripper, thought she had found love in a lesbian affair and then met and married the rising young comedian who later became so controversial. The sections dealing with Honey's show business career are so jejune that they sound like parody; the passages dealing with Lenny and their stormy, drug-obsessed life together are always interesting and at times absorbing. Most affecting is the picture of Bruce after his busts for obscenity had started—a paranoid, monomaniacal, frenetic wreck. [January]

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE:

The Life of Abraham Lincoln. Stephen B. Oates. Harper & Row, \$15.95 ISBN 0-06-013283-3

The blurb for Oates's highly readable, dramatic life of President Lincoln suggests that it's an exposé of the "real" Lincoln which emphasizes his disdain for parental background, lust for political power, etc. Such points are made only fleetingly as the author is swept along by the tide of epic events which tried and tested Lincoln and bore him to glory. This book has the appeal of a good novel with no distracting footnotes. But it's clear from an appendage of notes at the end that Oates has studied all sources—the flood of biographies and memoirs on the Civil War president with which his book will be inevitably compared. Oates has done an admirable job with this portrayal of Lincoln's life and character, the con-

Perform a death-defying act.



Stop smoking.

Give Heart Fund
American Heart Association

Newsweek

From
CHARLES PANATI

Dear Hal and Russ,

I just finished your book and think it is wonderful. Beautifully done.

I'm filled with curiosity to see how it is received--what with the impressive data, the sober presentation, the introduction by Margaret Mead, everything--I particularly liked the chapter on the "Loyal Opposition." You put the facts straight and put everyone in his place--all the while be level-headed and gentlemanly (more that can be said for the Loyal Opposition).

Thank you for mentioning the Geller Papers. I regard it an honor to have my name in your book. I wish you more than luck, you both deserve it.

Best wishes for the New Year,

Charles

line movement, some institu-
tion, viewed by those excluded from
confident, enlightened, sensi-
class liberalism, like that sus-
and controlling this book, has
been as nothing less than a move-
or institution—perhaps a com-
movement at that.

the point of largest substance
restorations is the thing posi-
added, present now, absent be-
that which forces, by its star-
presence, a reconsideration of
and where you are. In letters
an authority that depends alto-
upon inwardness with the
character of the times, that can
without winking, say—as a cur-
fashionable novel speaks—of
as “the most profound moral
of our time.” There’s another
ity derived from an instinct for
tioning; in its books, regardless
times, sanity is a rule not an
and shamelessness invariably
ned shame. “Responses” recov-
outline of the latter kind of
ity, and it is, to repeat, a cleans-
ght. ■

in 1911 (at the age of 48) when
transformed the literal Alexandrian
of his poems into a “metaphor-
,” Keeley traces the evolution
poet’s mythic model through
gressive stages as “sensual city”
mythical Alexandria,” which in-
expands to embrace the entire
of Hellenism”; from there the
finally attains a “universal per-
ze.” Fortunately, Keeley under-
that what the critic reads as
sal qualities are less than con-
ly wrought by poets, and his
chapter shows how the detached
vision of some of the late poems
springs out of, is possible only
of, the poet’s meticulous and
not working-out of his personal
tal structure. The complex and
and integrity of Cavafy’s model,
st produced by a modern poet,
ealed by the demonstration of
st that each of its phases is sub-
in its successors. Thus Keeley
y shows how the eroticism of
ems of the “sensual city” not
exists on the two planes of the
st and modern worlds where
parallelism denotes the continui-
a hedonistic ethic and the radical-
erent social status of its practi-
s, but that it also joins with his
major themes to contribute to
s final vision of the human
n under the aspect of eternity,
lebrate it still for the passions
l, even as one sees the death
rs.” ■



The Mind Field

By Robert E. Ornstein.
128 pp. New York: Grossman/Viking.
\$6.95.

By JEFFREY KLEIN

Laughs come easy nowadays to those who never believed in the human potential movement. Most students of higher consciousness have either become zombies in some corporate growth enterprise or themselves joined the ranks of the disillusioned. As with American political radicalism, it is extremely difficult to maintain a responsible, forward course. Teachers, like Robert Ornstein, who pointed out the limits of the Western mind, have been outflanked by cultists of all stripes, united only by their mindlessness. It is thus understandable why “The Mind Field” is inspired by utter dismay.

Professor Ornstein wants “to separate the current lofty metaphysical inflation, the goofiness, the outright lies, and the commercialism from the real possibility and discipline.” Although he speaks from the platform of academic psychology, he is not addressing just his colleagues. The bogus scientific “validations” of Transcendental Meditation upset him both because they are professionally sloppy and because they obscure the purpose of spiritual pursuits.

While Ornstein admits TM may have some beneficial relaxing effects, nothing angers him more than the use of the esoteric tradition as a form of psychotherapy. He believes that Freudian hydraulics are not only a poor explanation of human problems, but that attention to personal problems now leads us off the main evolutionary track. “In an undegenerated esoteric tradition, the ordinary self is not to

Jeffrey Klein is an editor of *Mother Jones*, a new national monthly of politics and the arts.

affirmed, or even ‘observed,’ but merely set aside as an unreliable judge of

While each of “The Mind Field” critiques—of secret Gurdjieff groups, mystical sport centers, Carlos Castaneda, Uri Geller—is sensible, the continual scolding tone becomes unpleasant. The sighs of dismay breathing throughout this book collect into a whine. Eventually Professor Ornstein presents his choice of an esoteric psychology for all seasons: contemporary Sufism. “The Mind Field’s” final section is a guided reading of 11 Sufi tales selected from the recent anthologies of Indries Shah.

Yet for all Professor Ornstein’s talk about intuitive wholistic understanding, his map of the mind field is surprisingly flat: it lacks any political dimension. He never considers that there could be reasons particular to America why our psychological explorations become desperate personal quests or become reified into “consciousness” for conspicuous consumption. The frustrated yearnings for community behind such quests are never examined. Ornstein writes: “It is an unfortunate accident of the 20th-century that those most interested in personal knowledge and in an extended conception of man tend to be those least suited to gaining or using them.” An unfortunate accident? Instead of analyzing why we produce timid professionals on the one hand and unprincipled quacks on the other, Professor Ornstein seems content to scold.

On the West Coast at least, Robert Ornstein is justly well-known for experiments which show that intuition or “right brain thinking” probably has a physiological basis. Because he is a respectable scientist, he has been looked to by many as a consciousness expert. “The Mind Field” seems born out of too many lecture tours, too many dinners and symposia and parties full of curious strangers. It is as if, having been asked the same grand questions too often, Professor Ornstein finally lost his temper and said: “All right, you want to know what I think of all these damn movements, well let me tell you. . . .”

How-not-to guides rarely help beginners. Those readers who are just now becoming curious about Yoga, Zen, biofeedback, parapsychology and the like would be better off turning to Ornstein’s earlier book, “The Psychology of Consciousness.” It is a comprehensive and often graceful introduction to esoteric psychology. Those readers who already appreciate the esoteric tradition will have to look beyond “The Mind Field” for mature leadership. As yet we do not have a contemporary American “Guide for the Perplexed.” ■